DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 442 TM 014 236

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TITLE	Employment among High School Juniors: A Study of Selected Variables.
PUB DATE	Nov 89
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Little Rock, AR, November 8-10, 1989).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Academic Aspiration; Education Work Relationship; Extracurricular Activities; *Grade 11; Grade Point Average; High Schools; *High School Students; Part Time Employment; Postsecondary Education; *Predictor Variables; Public Schools; Racial Differences; Regression (Statistics); Sex Differences; Socioeconomic Status; *Student Employment
IDENTIFIERS	Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between employment status among high school juniors and the following: (1) grade point average (GPA); (2) scores on Brown and Holtzman's Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA--W. F. Brown and W. H. Holtzman, 1967); (3) the level of participation in extracurricular activities; (4) plans for postsecondary education; (5) number of hours worked; (6) race; (7) gender; and (8) socioeconomic level. Multiple regression was used to analyze the data obtained from 400 high school juniors (200 working and 200 not working during the fall of 1988). Subjects were enrolled in public high schools in a southern city. There was a significant relationship between employment status and GPA and SSHA scores, with a lower mean GPA and lower SSHA scores among working students than among non-working students. The collective variables of number of hours worked, gender, race, and socioeconomic level also had a significant relationship with SSHA scores. The findings suggest that administrative personnel need to evaluate the merits and disadvantages of student employment. Although the American work ethic is admirable, the trade-offs may be too costly for high school students. Five tables present the study data. (Author/SLD)

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Employment Among High School Juniors: A Study of Selected Variables

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Running head: STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between employment status among high school juniors and the following: GPA, scores on Brown and Holtzman's Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA), level of participation in extracurricular activities, plans for postsecondary education, number of hours worked, race, gender, and socioeconomic level. Multiple regression was used to analyze the data from 400 high school juniors. There was a significant relationship between employment status and GPA and SSHA scores. The collective variables of number of hours worked, gender, race, and socioeconomic level had a significant relationship with SSHA scores. The findings suggest that administrative personnel need to be concerned about the extent to which employment is related to scholastic behaviors.

Employment Among High School Juniors: A Study of Selected Variables

Since the startling reports of A Nation at Risk (1983) and The High School Study (1982), educational reform has focused on more stringent graduation requirements, teacher accountability, and standardized testing. Though a myriad of factors and variables may account for the decline in educational achievement (GPA) among American youth, the fact that remains most disturbing is that college-entrance test scores have steadily declined since 1965. In an effort to upgrade American education and to improve college-entrance test scores of students, school boards across the nation have strengthened graduation requirements, limited elective offerings, recommended more homework, and encouraged more time-on-task during the school day.

To compound the seriousness of the situation in public education, recent study group reports on higher education, Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education (1984), To Reclaim a Legacy (1984), Integrity in College Curriculum (1985), and College: The Undergraduate Experience (1986), have reiterated the need to upgrade public education for those desiring postsecondary education as well as the need for improving college

curriculum and the outcomes of postsecondary education.

Perhaps the most revealing statement of the status of the American educational system was that of analyst Paul Copperman, as reported in A Nation at Risk:

> Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach those of their parents. (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1983).

If such a statement seems shocking, consider the fact that today's working teens may be spending more time at jobs than they are spending at school. A segment of an April 15, 1988, NBC broadcast of Mainstreet, hosted by Maria Shriver addressed this very problem. Among the findings revealed in the program were the following: (a) "Many high-schoolers said they'd rather settle for learning less and earning more"; (b) "Three-fourths of all high school students have part-time jobs, and a quarter of those working teens spend more time on the job than in school"; (c) "We're not talking about young people who have to work to help out their families. That is only one in twenty. We're talking about

teenagers who've decided to work in order to have more money to spend. Now, that is about three million young people nation-wide (NBC TV: Mainstreet, April 15, 1988).

Yet the generally accepted principle of the "American work ethic" has produced a true dilemma in that one of the factors which may be influencing the academic achievement of secondary students is the number of students being employed while still in school. Part-time and full-time employment of high school students is increasing; therefore, a question of major concern to educators is just how much and to what extent has teenage employment influenced academic achievement?

An article by Johnson (1980) addresses this issue by examining the psychological effect teen employment has on academic achievement. Johnson solicits the comments of Pecaut, a psychologist in the Chicago area who specializes in counseling teenagers. Pecaut says: "The problem is that work distracts too many teens from their studies, and the jobs they hold don't really develop responsibility" (1980, p. 52). Pecaut believes that the teenager with money becomes accustomed to immediate gratification, and this undermines his

willingness to work hard in his studies.

Greenberger and Steinberg's recent work, When Teenagers Work: The Psychological and Social Costs of Employment (1986), discusses the distinctively American phenomenon of massive numbers of school-attending teens in the labor force. They cite four sets of societal trends contributing to this issue: (a) the comparatively recent yet profound economic and occupational changes that have taken place in all postindustrial societies; (b) a powerful ideology about the psychological meaning of work deeply rooted in American history and culture; (c) the legacy of the 1960s in the encouragement of parental permissiveness and youthful self-gratification; and (d) the increased emphasis on materialism and consumerism manifested in the society at large, and stimulated and sustained on a massive scale by the mass media, with intensive programming specifically directed at teenage and pre-teenage populations.

The purposes of this study were to examine the relationship between employment status and grade point average as well as the relationship between employment status and study habits and attitudes among high school juniors. Additionally, the study analyzed employment

status among high school juniors and the level of participation in extracurricular activities with "level" consisting of categories of hours per week participation in extracurricular activities. Employment status among high school juniors and their plans for postsecondary education were also examined.

Method

The population in this study consisted of 851 juniors enrolled in three public high schools in a southern city. Juniors were selected for this study because these students generally carry a full schedule as opposed to many senior students who do not attend school on a full-time basis. Special education students and any junior students who were enrolled for less than six classes per day were not included in the study. Through the junior English teachers at the three high schools, students electing to participate in the study completed a questionnaire and a standardized instrument, Brown and Holtzman's Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA). The questionnaire, designed and validated by the researchers, yielded demographic data concerning employment, level of participation in extracurricular activities, plans for postsecondary education, race, gender, socioeconomic level, parent

employment, and other descriptive data.

After categorizing students as working or non-working during the fall of 1988, 400 students were randomly selected, 200 from each category. With assistance from the school system's data processing department, grade point averages (4.0 scale) for the fall semester of 1988 were obtained for the 400 juniors in the sample. Multiple linear regression was the statistical technique used to analyze the data.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results and Discussion

In this study while controlling for gender, race, and socioeconomic level, employment status was significantly related to both GPA and scores on the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (Table 1). There was no significant relationship between employment status and the level of participation in extracurriculur activities or plans for postsecondary education while controlling for gender, race, and socioeconomic level.

Insert Table 2 about here

Major findings of the descriptive data include the

following. The mean GPA among working students (1.927) was lower than the mean GPA among non-working students (2.245), and employed students scored lower on the SSHA (29.140) than non-employed students (37.700) (Table 2).

Insert Table 3 about here

Concerning parent employment and family income, more non-working students (46.5%) than working students (35.5%) reported only one parent working, yet more working students (35.0%) than non-working students (30.5%) indicated parent income over $50,000 per year (Table 3). More employed students (45.0%) than non-employed students (34.5%) limited extracurricular participation to one to eight hours per week (Table 4). A majority of the working students (73%) stated they arranged or rearranged their extracurricular participation and their personal time to accommodate work (Table 5).

Insert Table 4 about here

This study indicated that both GPA and scores on the SSHA were significantly related to employment status, although practically speaking, the strength of the relationships was modest. While it is recognized

that employment status alone is not the only variable influencing GPA and scores on the SSHA, the finding suggests that parents and educators should be concerned about the relationship. Other factors not addressed in this study may also relate to GPA and scores on the SSHA, such factors as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and parental expectation, as well as the correlation of students' educational goals and

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Insert Table 5 about here

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objectives and a school's educational goals and objectives. The variable of employment status could not predict either students' participation in extracurricular activities or their plans for postsecondary education.

Educators, and parents especially, are faced with the dilemma of the value of employment for high school students and the effect employment may have on the school experience. Teenagers who work are bound to experience the conflicts between obligations at work and responsibilities at school. Perhaps the situation of working teens is a bigger problem than once imagined. Perhaps the messages of society that work is beneficial, that it builds character and instills self-

discipline are in conflict with the aims of education. Perhaps, too, the values of our society, particularly the admiration for the working and economically independent person have shortchanged the importance of education without intending to do so. The result is that many of America's teens seem to value their work at the expense of their education.

The findings of this study as they pertain to a particular southern community suggest that parents and educators need to evaluate the merits and demerits of student employment and the extent to which employment is related to students' GPAs and study habits and attitudes toward school. Additionally, parents, administrators, teachers, counselors, and students need to be cognizant of the most recent literature on the subject of student employment, evaluating the particular situation within a given school system, classroom, or home. Though the "American work ethic" is to be admired and emulated, the trade-offs for high school students may be too costly.

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Table 1

Regression Results for Employment Status, Plans for Postsecondary Education and Level of Participation in Extracurricular Activities While Controlling for Gender, Race, and Socioeconomic Level

Testing	Criterion	RSQ_f	RSQ_r	Diff	F	df	sig
Full Model	GPA	.099	0	.099	4.79	9/390	.000
Emp	GPA	.099	.075	.024	10.48	1/390	.001
Full Model	SSHA	.099	0	.099	4.78	9/390	.000
Emp	SSHA	.099	.078	.021	8.52	1/390	.004
Full Model	Emp	.022	0	.022	.67	13/386	.790
Plans	Emp	.022	.016	.006	.50	5/386	.780
Full Model	Emp	.029	0	.029	.96	12/387	.491
Extra Curricular	Emp	.029	.016	.013	1.29	4/387	.274

Note. Emp denotes employment status; f and r denote full and restricted models respectively.

Table 2

Comparison of Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum on SSHA and GPA for Subgroups and Total Sample

Variable:	SSHA			GPA		
	Emp N=200	Not N=200	Total N=400	Emp N=200	Not N=200	Total N=400
Mean	29.140	37.700	33.420	1.927	2.245	2.086
SD	24.695	27.251	26.323	.887	.878	.896

Note. Emp denotes employment status.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Parent Employment and Income

	Student Employment					
	N = 200 Employed		N = 200 Not Employed		N = 400 Total	
Variable	f	%	f	%	f	%
Parent Employment						
No parent works	5	2.5	5	2.5	10	2.5
One parent works	71	35.5	93	46.5	164	41.0
Both parents work	124	62.0	102	51.0	226	56.5
Family Income						
<$10,000	5	2.5	5	2.5	10	2.5
< 20,000	19	9.5	14	7.0	33	8.2
< 30,000	25	12.5	25	12.5	50	12.5
< 40,000	35	17.5	48	24.0	83	20.7
< 50,000	45	22.5	46	23.0	91	22.7
> 50,000	70	35.0	61	30.5	131	32.7
No response	1	.5	1	.5	2	.7

Note. Income excludes student earnings.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of Students by Gender, Race, Extracurricular hours per week and Type of Household

	N = 200 Employed		N = 200 Not Employed		N = 400 Total Sample	
Variable	f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender						
Male	100	50.0	83	41.5	183	45.7
Female	100	50.0	117	58.5	217	54.2
Race						
Black	23	11.5	23	11.5	46	11.5
White	173	86.5	170	85.0	343	85.7
Other	4	2.0	7	3.5	11	2.7
Extracurricular Hours Per Week*						
1 - 8	91	45.0	71	34.5	162	40.5
9 - 16	42	21.0	56	28.0	98	24.5
17 - 24	15	7.5	17	8.5	32	8.0
No response	52	25.0	56	28.0	108	27.0

* Multiple responses allowed

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages Among Employed Students Who Arranged or Rearranged Time to Accommodate Work

N = 200

Variable	f	%
Academic schedule	29	14.5
Extracurricular participation	46	23.0
Personal time	100	50.0
No response	25	12.5